

#SLEEP-WELL

The 4-7-8 Method



Falling asleep or coming down from anxiety might never be as easy as 1-2-3, but some experts believe a different set of numbers – 4-7-8 – comes much closer to doing the trick.

The 4-7-8 technique is a relaxation exercise that involves breathing in for four counts, holding that breath for seven counts and exhaling for eight counts, said Dr Raj Dasgupta, a clinical associate professor of medicine at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine.

Also known as the "relaxing breath," 4-7-8 has ancient roots in pranayama, which is the yogic practice of breath regulation, but was popularized by integrative medicine specialist Dr. Andrew Weil in 2015.

"What a lot of sleep difficulties are all about is people who struggle to fall asleep because their mind is buzzing," said Rebecca Robbins, an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School and associate scientist in the division of sleep and circadian disorders



at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. "But exercises like the 4-7-8 technique give you the opportunity to practice being at peace. And that's exactly what we need to do before we go to bed."

How 4-7-8 Works

The 4-7-8 method doesn't require any equipment or specific setting, but when you're initially learning the exercise, you should sit with your back straight, according to Weil. Practicing in a calm, quiet place could help, said Robbins. Once you get the hang of it, you can use the technique while lying in bed.

During the entire practice, place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue behind your upper front teeth, as you'll be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue. Then follow these steps, according to Weil:

- Completely exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and quietly inhale through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound for a count of eight.
- Repeat the process three more times for a total of four breath cycles.

Keeping to the ratio of four, then seven and then eight counts is more important than

the time you spend on each phase, according to Weil.

A lack of sleep can cause us to become selfish, a new study has found. If you have trouble breathing, holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep the ratio (consistent) for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply," his website advised.

When you're stressed out, your sympathetic nervous system – responsible for your fight-or-flight response – is overly active, which makes you feel overstimulated and not ready to relax and transition into sleep, Dasgupta said. "An active sympathetic nervous system can cause a fast heart rate as well as rapid and shallow breathing."

What Research Shows

The 4-7-8 breathing practice can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system – responsible for resting and digesting – which reduces sympathetic activity, he added, putting the body in a state more conducive to restful sleep. Activating the parasympathetic system also gives an anxious brain something to focus on besides "why am I not sleeping?" Tal said.

While proponents may swear by the method, more research is needed to establish clearer links between 4-7-8 and sleep and other health benefits, he added.

"There is some evidence that 4-7-8 breathing helps reduce anxious, depressive and insomnia symptoms when comparing pre- and post-intervention, however, there are no large randomized control trials specifically on 4-7-8 breathing to my knowledge," Tal said. "The research on (the effect of) diaphragmatic breathing on these symptoms in general is spotty, with no clear connection due to the poor quality of the studies."

A team of researchers based in Thailand studied the immediate effects of 4-7-8 breathing on heart rate and blood pressure among 43 healthy young adults. After participants had their health factors and their fasting blood glucose measured, they performed 4-7-8 breathing for six cycles per set for three sets, interspersed with one minute of normal breathing between each set. Researchers found the technique improved participants' heart rate and blood pressure.

When researchers have observed the effects of breathing techniques like 4-7-8 breathing, they have seen an increase in theta and delta brain waves, which indicate someone is in the parasympathetic state, Robbins said. "Slow breathing like the 4-7-8 technique reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes and improves pulmonary function."



My unit had a mascot, a very large sized goat called Moti. He had been brought up in the unit since birth and as Moti was in the care of the personnel of the pipe band, they trained him to march in step to the beat of military tunes. From there to becoming the mascot was but a matter of time. Moti was duly given the uniform and other accoutrements worn by the band and became an inseparable part of unit life. He even got his lance corporal stripes when he was due for promotion. However, Moti could get temperamental and on one ceremonial occasion, he not only marched to the wrong beat but stepped out of line. The Commanding Officer (CO) was not pleased with this show of indiscipline and had his stripe removed. The pipe band was heartbroken as was the rest of the battalion, though Moti didn't seem too overly upset by the punishment. Anyway, when the mascot did a good job next time around, the CO restored his rank, much to the relief of all concerned.

The Tomb



I moved to the Kashmir Valley for the first time in the winter of 1979 to re-join my battalion, located at that time next to a charming, rustic village nestled in the mountains, about twenty kilometres from Srinagar. Terrorism had not yet raised its ugly head in those days and the valley was thronged with tourists from all over the country as also from most parts of the world. My wife and I often travelled on our scooter to explore the countryside with its gurgling brooks and majestic Chinar trees. During our frequent sojourns we invariably came across a host of small tombs called 'Mazars' dotting the roadside, each having a multitude of green flags flying proudly in the breeze. There was no shortage of visitors to these Mazars, believed to be the resting place of ancient sages and reverentially called 'PirBabas'.



#BABA TALES

An occasional visitor would often put up a green flag while seeking the blessings of the 'Pir' and thus the flags became an integral part of each tomb.

Moti-the Mascot

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World Arthritis Day

Throughout the world millions of people are affected by arthritis, their lives being changed by the sometimes constant pain of inflamed joints. World Arthritis Day is a day to remember and raise awareness of this condition, and how it affects the lives of those who suffer with it. World Arthritis Day was brought about by the Arthritis Foundation to do just that, and to encourage policymakers to help lower the burden of those suffering from Arthritis all over the world.

overly upset by the punishment. Anyway, when the mascot did a good job next time around, the CO restored his rank, much to the relief of all concerned. Unfortunately, age was catching up with Moti, who at sixteen years was approaching the last stage of his life. He was a Sergeant now, having been promoted by previous COs, and still did duties as a mascot, but all of us knew that time was running out for him. When he finally died at the ripe old age of just under seventeen years, he was given a befitting burial near the entrance to the unit area and a small tombstone was erected in his honour with the single word 'MOTT' emblazoned in large letters.

Moti's Tombstone

More than two decades later, while on an official visit to Srinagar, I fitted in a quick trip to my old unit location, more to go down memory lane than any other purpose. At the entrance to the unit, I observed a well maintained 'Mazar' and faint stirrings of the events of yesteryears made me halt at the spot. The young Captain accompany-

The flag was fluttering merrily in the breeze, perhaps to the rhythm of silent drumbeats of ancient songs. I had a feeling Moti was pleased. I certainly was.

ing me explained that it was perhaps the tomb of an ancient sage and his unit personnel always paid their respects at the site before moving out for operations. The tombstone was covered in green cloth. I raised the cloth and was not surprised to find the outline of the word 'MOTT' still discernible. In typical military fashion, each successive battalion coming to the area had added on to the structure,

which now had a gate, a boundary wall as also a roof to cover the tombstone. Time had lent credence to the legends that had spread about the miraculous powers of the revered 'Pir', his efficacy in granting boons and bestowing success. A motley collection of green coloured flags in assorted array sprinkled the area giving it a festive look. I wondered if I should reveal the truth about the shrine, but decided against it. Who was I to question faith? And if the act of planting a flag gave succour to some, then so be it. In life, Moti marched to the tune of martial music. In death, perhaps, his spirit played out long forgotten melodies to the many soldiers who visited his tomb, and gave them solace and strength to fight the cancer of terrorism afflicting the Valley. I took the flag which the Captain had brought for the purpose and firmly placed it in the shrine. When I left, the flag was fluttering merrily in the breeze, perhaps to the rhythm of silent drumbeats of ancient songs. I had a feeling Moti was pleased. I certainly was.

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#FOOD-TALK

Are Sprouts The Ultimate Superfood?

Yes, it is rich in nutrients, but as the body has a tough time breaking it down, it often leads to bloating.



Sprouts, known to be extremely nutritious and a powerhouse of proteins, are widely consumed for breakfast and even as a snack. They are also a rich source of fibre, calcium, vitamins A and C, potassium, and phosphorus. However, while sprouts are "rich in nutrients", the body has a "tough time" breaking them down. So, does this make sprouts unhealthy or unsuitable for some people? Let's find out.

Yes, it is rich in nutrients, but as the body has a tough time breaking it down, it often leads to bloating, acidity, constipation, and hemorrhoids (piles), in the long run. As per modern science sprouts are rich in protein, fats, fibre, and vitamins but in Ayurveda, sprouts are known to increase vata because when you assess sprouts they are halfway between being a seed and baby plant."

Anything that is halfway through transformation is tough to digest just like half-formed curd. It leads to bloating and formation of ama (toxins) leading to inflammation or pro-inflammatory molecules, which is why most of us feel bloated, gassy, acidic, and constipated.

Raw or uncooked sprouts, in particular, can cause food poisoning in those with autoimmune conditions and low immunity including children and the elderly.

Who Should Avoid It?

While most people can have sprouts, those with poor digestion or hampered agni, or vata or pitta prakriti should avoid it. However, people with kaphaprakriti are able to digest sprouts and can consume it more often – but only once or twice a week; never more than that."

To make it more digestible, even for people with kaphaprakriti, first cook it with a small amount of oil, preferably coconut oil, or ghee, or butter, and spices like cumin, ajwain (carom seed), and dry ginger powder.

Regular Consumption

For people who can't consume sprouts, you can also consume overnight-soaked pulses and legumes. It should be cooked with oil, salt, cumin, and garlic to make it easy to digest.

- A few ways to make them more digestible and safe to consume are:
1. Steam over a water bath and add to a salad.
 2. Blend and add to your dosa batter or pancake mix.
 3. Add sprouts to your khichdi – pressure cooking will soften and cook them, decreasing pressure on your system.



And Everyone Smiled



The CM was a worried man. His mole in the High Command had sent a cryptic warning. It said: "For some reason, Madam is unhappy with you. You had better do something fast. Your rival's emissaries are already sniffing around in Delhi."

The CM pondered his next step. Best to consult PC, he decided. Prakash Chandra or PC, as everyone called him, was the CM's confidant, trouble-shooter and private eye, all rolled into one.

Decked in a safari suit with the top button open, revealing the thick gold chain around his beefy neck, PC paced up and down the CM's chamber in deep thought. Five minutes passed. Suddenly he stopped in mid-stride and a crafty smile lit up his face.

"I've got it, sir!" he cried out. "Madam's birthday is next month. We will arrange a sari distribution

#LITTLE LIVES

function for destitute women that day. We will arrange photo ops for journalists with you handing over a sari to a poor woman below the backdrop of a giant portrait of Madam. When it comes in the news the next day, I am sure Madam will be pleased."

The CM chewed over the idea and then admitted, "It might just work. But PC, the whole thing is going to cost a packet."

Smiling indulgently, PC said, "I already have a donor in mind. Do you remember that builder, Reddy, who has been pestering you for the last few months to enable him to get that large tract of agricultural land towards the north of the city converted to urban land? I think we can arrange a fair exchange with him."

Reddy, the realtor, was more than willing to part with the twenty lakhs needed for the function. After all, if the land conversion came through, he would make a few crores. He also did not demur when PC demanded two lakhs as his personal commission. Rules of the game.

The big day came. The function went through flawlessly. Under a large shamiana, a couple of hundred scruffy, tired-looking, weath-

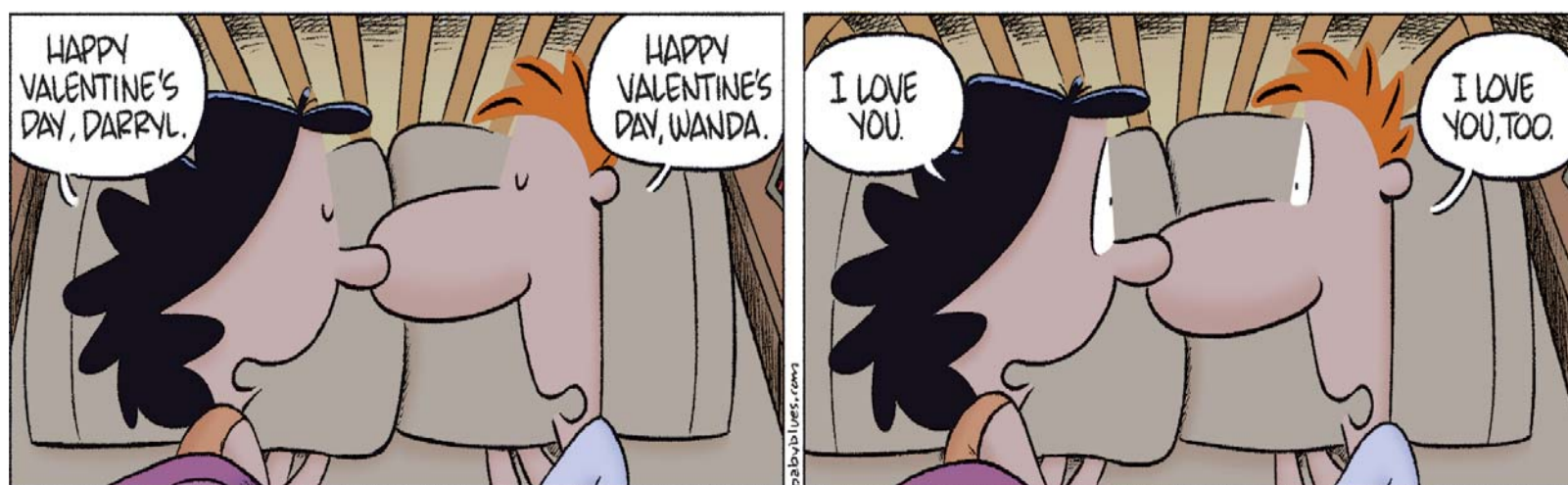
ered women sat patiently, while the party leaders on the dais, dwarfed by the huge portrait of Madam behind them, mouthed the customary sycophantic clichés of best wishes and praise to the "Great Leader" on her birthday. Among the few women chosen to be personally given a sari by the CM, in the glare of TV strobe lights and camera flashes, was Gowamma, a stout, short-statured woman of indeterminate age, swathed in a tattered grimy sari and dust-stained scruffy full-arm sweater.

She was a bag-woman, one of those creatures who shuffle from one garbage pile to another, pulling out discarded plastic bags to be sold to the neighbourhood waste wholesaler. The few rupees she got from that sale were usually

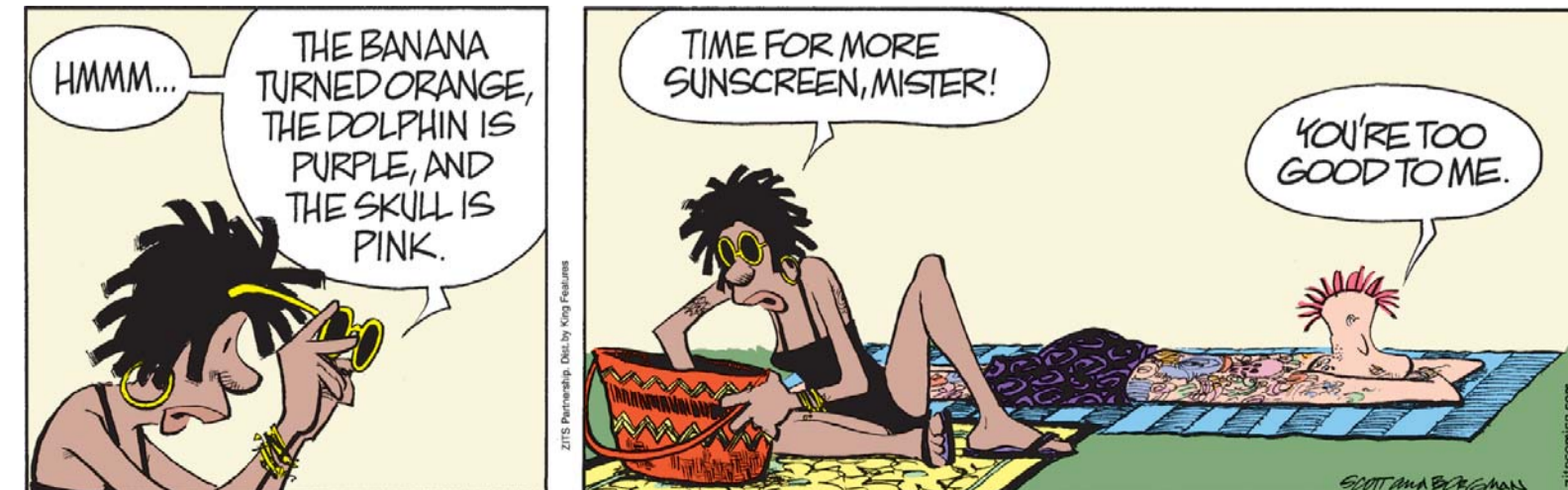


By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

BABY BLUES



ZITS



THE WALL

